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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001278

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS TO AF/W  
LONDON AND PARIS PASS TO AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL ASEC NI DOMESTICPOLITICS

SUBJECT: SUSPENDED PLATEAU GOVERNOR DARIYE: THE PROBLEM,  
OR MERELY A SCAPEGOAT?

REF: A. ABUJA 1277

B. ABUJA 572

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary. Opinions differ on whether the behavior of suspended Plateau State Governor Joshua Dariye was the cause of the conflict in the state that led to the State of Emergency (SOE), or whether he merely made a bad situation worse. All observers agree that he certainly didn't help, and that the state has other problems among its peoples. Dariye himself was rambling and incoherent in a meeting with Poloff, alternately accepting his fate and railing against the President. Dariye, never popular in Plateau, still makes noises about his future political career in spite of his current predicament. This is the second of four Plateau State cables. End Summary.

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Dariye's Bumbling: The Cause . . .  
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2. (SBU) During a recent trip to Plateau state (ref A), Emboffs encountered a variety of opinions. Most people, including those who supported Dariye to win elections, believed he did not handle the crisis effectively. Aside from his apparent weaknesses in taking decisive action, such as punishing and arresting those identified as the main architects of the crisis, his inflammatory remarks fueled the crisis. Before the SOE, Governor Dariye had granted many interviews where he was quoted as referring to the Hausa/Fulani as "settlers" and maintained that no matter how long they lived in the state, their status as settlers would not change.

3. (U) He had also taken some actions that portrayed him as a partisan leader. During the last local council elections, Dariye allowed elections to be held in 16 out of 17 local government areas (LGAs), deliberately excluding the Jos North LGA, where a Hausa/Fulani candidate would likely have emerged as chairman. Hausa/Fulani Muslim candidates had won all past elections in the area. Instead, Dariye appointed a Christian non-Hausa/Fulani to head the Jos North council on a "temporary basis," citing "security reports" as the reason.

4. (C) Ambassador Yahaya Kwande, a PDP kingmaker who had supported Dariye, told Poloff Dariye had made a "big mistake" by canceling the election in Jos North LGA, explaining that "sacrificing" Jos North would not have affected the fortune of Dariye's party, the PDP, in the State. The PDP would still have maintained its overwhelming majority in the State, winning 13 out of 17 LGAs. Dismissing the alleged "unfavorable reports" on conditions in Jos North LGA as mere "bad political calculations," Kwande asserted that elections were held in Wase, Kanam, Langtang and Shendam, where violence was ongoing at the time of the elections. Kwande also blamed Dariye for failing to create separate districts for the Hausa/Fulani in Jos and Yelwa-Shendam: this inaction heightened tension and suspicions that eventually led to bloody clashes. NOTE: The March local government elections were no better in Plateau State than in the rest of the country where turnout was possibly in the teens and little effort was made to put the trappings of an election onto predetermined results. (REF B). END NOTE.

5. (C) Yelwa Council Chairman Garba also criticized Dariye for the escalation of the crisis in Yelwa-Shendam. He stated that if soldiers initially stationed in Yelwa-Shendam had been in place when the militias came, the carnage would not have taken place. He accused Governor Dariye of deliberately ordering the soldiers and police to vacate the area, even though security reports indicated that the militias would likely attack.

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Or A Convenient Excuse?  
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6. (C) Suspended Plateau State Assembly Speaker Simon Lalong confessed that all parties in the State were guilty of using religion and ethnicity to achieve a political advantage. He explained that the endemic poverty in Nigeria has transformed

the common people into easy tools for manipulations by the elite. "The common people react to situations based on the information they receive from the elite. The elite can manipulate, twist and interpret such information to their personal advantage," Lalong declared. He said the elite are the ones responsible for maintaining peace, not the common people. Lalong recalled that attempts were made by the Plateau State Government to bring peace back to these warring communities. For instance, the Government decided to create two districts in Yelwa-Shendam, one belonging to the "indigenes," the other to "settlers." But when the final list was released, said Lalong, "the computer had mistakenly deleted the district assigned to the settlers." This "computer error" sparked spontaneous protests that escalated into communal violence.

17. (SBU) Speaker Lalong added that problems like cow theft have led to hostilities between the cattle-herding Fulani and the subsistence-farming natives. Such a problem would start from two people: the cow owner, usually a Fulani Muslim, and the native who stole the cow, most likely a Christian. The resulting conflict, when the owner either tries to recover the cows or punishes the accused thief, has often been mislabeled as religious conflict.

18. (C) In the framework of national politics, Dariye became irrelevant to President Obasanjo's plans and was seen as a supporter of Vice President Atiku Abubakar. According to one state official, Plateau State had been suffering from a lack of resources "for months" before declaration of the SOE. An observer from neighboring Benue State, where conflict continues today, pointed out that the SOE brought no additional security forces to the state and that the President, with direct control of the military and police, could have brought an end to the fighting at any time.

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Dariye Finds His Own Scapegoat  
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19. (C) Dariye told Poloff that powerful Abuja-based Plateau State natives like Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu (an Obasanjo acolyte) were responsible for the SOE and were currently plotting for the its extension. He said Mantu, who hails from the same senatorial zone as Dariye, wanted to terminate Dariye's political career. Dariye speculated that Mantu was particularly jittery that Dariye might express interest in contesting Mantu's senatorial seat in 2007. "Mantu is afraid that after my tenure expires in 2007, I will contest his seat. Hence, he is using his closeness with the President to destroy me politically".

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Is It All God's Will, or Just an Enemy Plot?  
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110. (C) Comment: During the 90-minute meeting with Poloff at his home in Bukuru, Dariye rambled incoherently about "plots" and "enemies," alternately blaming conspiracies against him and claiming that "God's will" is being done. Dariye claimed to be supported by 98% of the people of Plateau State, and that over a million Plateau State residents had visited him at his home. Although he has continued to support President Obasanjo publicly, Dariye expressed anger that the President had, in his words, "treated him unfairly." When asked what the future holds for him, Dariye spoke of continuing to run his two finance companies and hinted that he may even run for president someday. But even in a country where columnists wax nostalgic for the Abacha days, it would be a surprise for voters to forget that Dariye, unelected in two elections, first rose to national prominence by being suspended from the governor's office for incompetence. End Comment.  
CAMPBELL